

Good morning. I'm Jeffrey Anderson, the teaching pastor here at Northlake. A few weeks ago we began a study of the book of Philippians, and my goal is to continue to move right on through the book. Today I hope you will begin to see one of the advantages of preaching expositionally through an entire book of the Bible, rather than simply doing topical messages. By preaching expositionally we are forced to deal with texts that otherwise we would never touch (check out verse 29, for example). But in so doing it will require us to deal with difficult subjects, and as a result, come away with a better overall grasp of the New Testament (and/or the Old Testament, too).

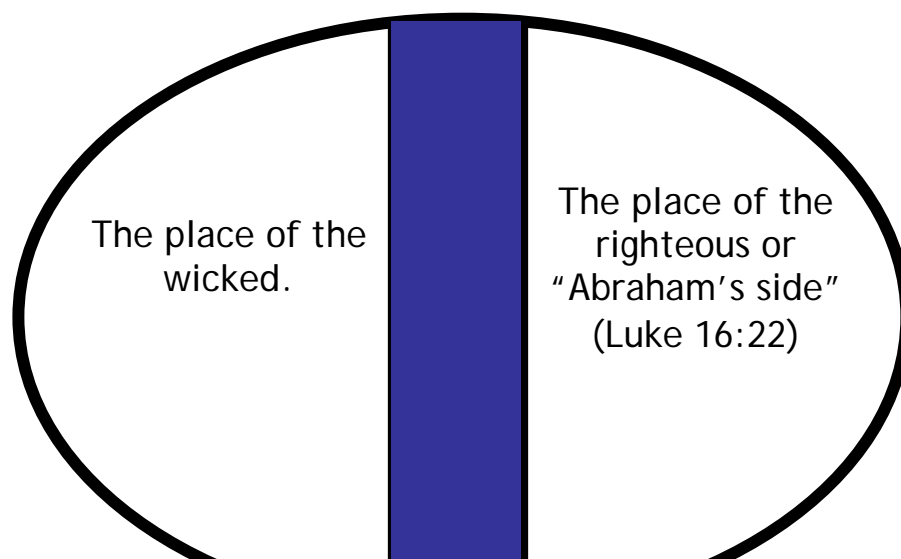
Philippians 1: 20-30—²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. ²⁷Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel ²⁸without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. ²⁹For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, ³⁰since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.”

²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²²If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

- He teaches us first about the nature of a Christian death: it is ‘to depart’. This may be a camping metaphor or a sailing metaphor.
- Death for the Christian is the end of what was at best a transitory thing, a camp-life.
- This ‘departing’ is a weighing of the anchor’, a ‘setting sail’.

Sheol ~The Place of the Dead (Luke 16)



- Soul sleep?
 - Death certainly would not have been “better by far” to Paul had he been conscious of any interval when he would not be with the Lord between his physical death and his physical resurrection.
- **H. G. C. Moule** speaks of ‘that delightful moment when the friendly flood heaves beneath the freed keel, and the prow is set straight and finally towards the shore of home, and the Pilot stands on board, at length “seen face to face.” And, lo, as He takes the helm, “immediately the ship is at the land whither they go” (John 6:21)’”¹
- Death to the Christian is (literally) ‘by far the best’.
- This is not to say that mourning is out of place for the Christian when loved ones go to be with the Lord. This does not take away the fact that our experience is of loss.
- To the thief on the cross Jesus said, “Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).
- In this same letter – bereavement brings: ‘sorrow upon sorrow’.
- These two ‘poles’ of confidence and tears should mark our attitude to death. We should face death ‘triumphantly’ – but not with that heartless and glossy triumph which can amount to denigrating the goodness and grace of God in this life.
- As far as personal enrichment was concerned, death would win hands down. But there is also the Philippian church. What of them? They still need his apostolic ministry. Paul believes it to be the will of the Lord.

²⁴**but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.** ²⁵**Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,**

- **Carson:** “The lesson to be learned is startlingly clear: Put the converts of the gospel at the center of your principled self-denial. Paul’s deepest hopes for his own immediate future turn neither on the bliss of immediately gaining heaven’s portals nor on returning to a fulfilling ministry and escaping the pangs of death, but on what is best for his converts. Often we are tempted to evaluate alternatives by thinking through what seems best for us. How often do we raise as a first principle what is best for the church? When faced with, say, a job offer that would take us to another city or with mortal illness that calls forth our diligent intercession, how quickly do we employ Paul’s criterion here established: What would be best for the church? What would be best for my brothers and sisters in Christ?”²

²⁶**so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.**

- When the Biblical truth of this theme grips you it frees you from fear and gives courage to live the most radical, self-sacrificing life of love.

¹ H. G. C. Moule, *The Second Epistle to Timothy* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1905), 140.

² Don A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 30.

- But if you can't say, "To die is gain," then you will probably say, in one degree or another, "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).
- **J. C. Ryle:** "I pity the man who never thinks about heaven."³
- **C.S. Lewis:** "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth "thrown in": aim at Earth and you will get neither."⁴
- Mehdi Dibaj of Iran was converted to Christ in 1984, and as a consequence he was imprisoned by the government on charges of "apostasy."
- Mehdi languished in prison for ten years before his case came to trial. His written statement of defense:
 - "[Jesus Christ] is our Saviour and He is the Son of God. To know Him means to know eternal life. I, a useless sinner, have believed in His beloved person and all His words and miracles recorded in the Gospel, and I have committed by life into His hands. Life for me is an opportunity to serve Him, and death is a better opportunity to be with Christ. Therefore I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honour of His Holy Name, but am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord..."
- On December 12, 1993, the court before whom this defense was made sentenced Mehdi to execution. Under intense pressure from people in the West who knew of the case, including the U.S. State Department, the Iranian government arranged Mehdi's release in January 1994. Seven months later, he was found dead "under suspicious circumstances" in a Tehran park.⁵

²⁷**Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.**

- "**Conduct yourselves**" (*politeuesthe*) carries a deeper significance than is immediately apparent from most English translations. It has a distinct political nuance.
- Paul is telling the Philippians to govern their lives according to the gospel rather than according to society's requirements for being a good citizen of Philippi.
- **Motyer:**
 - There is the defense of the gospel, and
 - The proclamation of the gospel, but
 - There is also the adornment of it by worthy living.⁶
- To put it bluntly, conduct worthy of the gospel is above all *conduct that promotes the gospel*.
- Hypocrisy disqualifies the message of the gospel:

³ J. C. Ryle, *Heaven* (Ross-sire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 19.

⁴ <http://www.bartleby.com/63/90/4190.html>.

⁵ See "Christian Found Dead, Iran Says," *The Boston Globe* (July 6, 1994), 8; As found in "Prominent Church Leaders Slain," *Christianity Today* (August 15, 1994), 54.

⁶ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 93.

- *Ills.* Hair restoration salesman that is bald.
- It is appropriate that people within a church are deeply impacted by the leaders within the church. However, it seems that far too often this impact goes further than it should.
 - A pastor resigns, and people lose their faith over it;
 - A pastor falls into some moral failure, and people are so devastated that they abandon Christ;
 - A pastor or leader moves to another town or church and the people participating in church-life.
- Again, it is appropriate that people are impacted by a pastor, but it should never be to the degree that their faith is imperiled.
- Paul wanted to make sure that regardless of how things would go for him (whether he was released from prison or whether he were executed, or whether he were to continue under house arrest) the Philippians were to go right on living in Christ.
 - How many of you have known about a church leader or pastor that did something stupid
 - Girls
 - Gold
 - Glory
 - How often people in the church are so devastated that they simply give up their faith.
 - Paul's admonition: **“happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man

- Given the subject matter, the goal seems unexpected: unity.
- If the Philippians remained faithful to the gospel in spite of Paul's circumstances, this would create a sense of unity among them. The sense of unity would undoubtedly create boldness and strength. A strength and boldness they would need to stand against certain people that were opposing them.
- **contending as one man** is literally, ‘with one mind.’
- The word translated ‘mind’ here (*psyche*) refers to the sphere of the affections and moral energies.
 - It points to what we feel about things and how we react to them. It raises the question of what things we consider valuable.
- Unity without
 - Mutual love,
 - Common interests and
 - Agreed values would be as cold as a marriage of convenience.
- Unity, like all Christian virtues, is something that should impact our affections.
- Standing firm under attack, while it requires stern resolution of the part of each individual, is a corporate matter, an activity of the fellowship.
 - “Standing firm” or “Steadfastness” is grounded in unity.

for the faith of the gospel

- *Ills. On the focus of the gospel:* Imagine two Jewish men at the time of the Passover.
- Mr. Smith asks Mr. Jones, “Have you sprinkled the blood of a lamb on the two doorposts and on the lintel over the entrance to your dwelling?”
 - “Of course,” replies Mr. Jones. “I’ve followed Moses’ instructions exactly.”

“So have I,” affirms Mr. Smith. “But I have to admit I’m very nervous. My boy Charlie means the world to me. If, as Moses says, the angel of death is passing through the land tonight, taking out all the firstborn in the land—I just don’t know what I’ll do if Charlie dies.”

“But that’s the point. He won’t die. That’s why you sprinkled the lamb’s blood on the doorposts and on the lintel. Moses said that when the angel of death sees the blood, he will ‘pass over’ the house so protected, and the first born will be safe. Why are you worried?”

“I know, I know,” splutters Mr. Smith somewhat irritably, “but you have to admit that there have been some very strange goings-on these last few months. Some of the plagues have afflicted only the Egyptians, of course, but some of them have hit us too. The thought that Charlie could be in danger is terribly upsetting.”

Rather unsympathetically, Mr. Jones replies, “I really can’t imagine why you’re fretting. After all, I have a son, too, and I think I love him just as much as you love your Charlie. But I am completely at peace: God promised that the angel of death would pass over every house whose door is marked by blood in the way he prescribes, and I take him at his word.

That night the angel of death passed through the land. Who lost his son, Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones?

The answer, of course, is neither. The fulfillment of God’s promise that the angel of death would simply “pass over” and not destroy their firstborn depended not on the intensity of the faith of the residents but only on whether or not they had sprinkled blood on the doorposts and on the lintel. In both cases the blood was shed, the houses marked; in both cases the firstborn son was saved.

The promise of deliverance, the assurance that we are accepted by Almighty God, is tied not to the intensity of our faith or to the consistency of our faith or to the purity of our faith, but to the object of our faith.”

²⁸**without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.**

- Frightened (*ptyromai*) is found only here in biblical Greek and denotes ‘the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses’.⁷
- Life lived in conformity with the gospel along with others will create a holy boldness. Such boldness is not easily intimidated.

This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.

- This unity, this standing firm in one spirit, the “contending as one man for the faith of the gospel,” serves as a double sign:
- **Carson:** “[Y]our change in character, your united stand in defense of the gospel, your ability to withstand with meekness and without fear the opposition that you must endure, constitute a sign. That sign speaks volumes, both to the outside world and to the Christian community. It is a sign of judgment against the world that is mounting the opposition; it is a sign of assurance that these believers really are the people of God.”⁸

²⁹**For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,**

⁷ R. P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1959), 86.

⁸ Carson, 55.

- **Thielman:** “This startling statement probably has two characteristics of Christian suffering in view. (1) Suffering is a gift because, when successfully endured, it confirms the future salvation of the believer. (2) It is a gift because through it we become identified with Christ’s suffering.”⁹
- **Carson:** “If their salvation has been secured by the suffering of another on their behalf, their discipleship is to be demonstrated in their own suffering on his behalf. Surely this should not be surprising. In what sense could it be said of us that we follow Jesus Christ, if there is no cross-bearing in our life?”¹⁰
- Suffering, then, far from being evidence of divine forgetfulness, is ‘sign or proof’ of the legitimacy of God’s work of grace.

³⁰**since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.**

- They had seen the hardship Paul endured for the sake of the gospel when he came to Philippi.
 - He and Silas had been stripped, beaten, and jailed for “throwing [Philippi] into an uproar.”
 - After the arrival of this letter, the Philippians will have heard both from Epaphroditus and from Paul’s own pen of the hardship that he was presently enduring in prison for the advancement of the gospel.

Application:

This past week I was reading a book by William Perkins. Perkins was considered one of the greatest Puritan pastors. I found it interesting to find out that, not only Perkins, but all of the Puritans followed a similar method of preaching. They would take the following steps.

- Read the particular passage
- Explain the passage
- Find the central doctrine found in the passage
- Carefully show how the passage and doctrine apply to life.
- A few thoughts on suffering?

God sovereignty presides over all things, even in your suffering—it is not outside his control.

- **Margaret Clarkson:** “The sovereignty of God is the one impregnable rock to which the suffering human heart must cling. The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident: they may be the work of evil, but the evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God... All evil is subject to Him, and evil cannot touch His children unless He permits it. God is the Lord of human history and of the personal history of every member of His redeemed family.”¹¹

⁹ Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 94.

¹⁰ Carson, 55.

¹¹ Margaret Clarkson, quoted in "Does Divine Sovereignty Make a Difference in Everyday Life?" by Jerry Bridges in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), vol. I: 209.

- This does not mean that when God uses the sins of others that he associates himself with sin or sympathizes with it. He never condones sin. But sin can never usurp authority over his providence.
- **John 11:49-51**—⁴⁹Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! ⁵⁰You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." ⁵¹He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation."
- **Concurrence:**
 - "God cooperates with created things in every action, directing their distinctive properties to cause them to act as they do."¹²
 - **Seemingly Random or Chance Events:** "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."
 - **Events fully caused by God and fully caused by the creature as well:** "It is incorrect for us to reason that if we know the 'natural' cause of something in this world, then God did not cause it. Rather, if it rains we should thank him. If crops grow we should thank him. In all of these events, it is not as though the event was partly caused by God and partly by factors in the created world...such events are entirely caused by God. Yet we know that (in another sense) they are entirely caused by factors in the creation as well."¹³
 - **Grudem:** "Exactly how God combines his providential control with our willing and significant choices, Scripture does not explain to us. But rather than deny one aspect or the other (simply because we cannot explain how both can be true), we should accept both in an attempt to be faithful to the teaching of all of Scripture."¹⁴
 - **Ills:** In the Shakespearean play *Macbeth*, the character Macbeth murders King Duncan. The question may be asked: 'who killed King Duncan?' On one level, the correct answer is 'Macbeth.' Within the context of the play he carried out the murder and is rightly to blame for it. But on another level, a correct answer would be 'William Shakespeare': he wrote the play, he created all the characters in it, and he wrote the part where Macbeth killed King Duncan.
 - It would not be correct to say that because Macbeth killed King Duncan, William Shakespeare did not kill him. Nor the reverse. Both are true.
 - **Bridges:** "God's sovereignty over people does not mean we do not experience pain and suffering. It means that God is in control of our pain and suffering, and that He has in mind a beneficial purpose for it. There is no such thing as pain without a purpose for the child of God. We may be sure that however irrational and inexplicable it seems to us, all pain has a purpose."¹⁵
 - God does not waste pain!

¹² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 317.

¹³ Grudem, 319.

¹⁴ Grudem, 321.

¹⁵ Jerry Bridges in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), vol. I.

- **Joseph:** “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen. 50:20).

Discipline: Suffering and hardship should be interpreted as discipline from God.

- **Hebrews 12: 7-11**—“⁷Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”
 - When we encounter difficulty, hardship or suffering we should immediately interpret as discipline.
 - You may say, “This suffering I’m going through is actually not being caused by God but by a person that is simply mean-spirited.”
 - The writer of Hebrews: “Interpret as discipline.”
 - You may say, “This suffering I’m going through is actually the work of Satan.”
 - The writer of Hebrews: “Interpret as discipline.”
 - You may say, “This suffering I’m going through is actually the result of my own stupid choices and decisions.”
 - The writer of Hebrews: “Interpret as discipline.”

Connected to the idea of discipline is that God uses suffering to mold not only our thinking but also our affections.

- **Piper:** “It is astonishing to me that so many people try to define true Christianity in terms of decisions and not affections. Not that decisions are unessential. [But] the problem is that they require so little transformation to achieve.”¹⁶
- **Jonathan Edwards:** “The kind of faith acceptable to God does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us only a little above a state of indifference: God, in His Word, insists that if we are in earnest, we will be ‘fervent in spirit,’ and our hearts will be vigorously involved with our faith.”¹⁷

Suffering serves as a sign:

- This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.
- Paul speaks in a similar vein when he writes,
- **2 Corinthians 2: 14-16**—“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.”

Suffering serves to make us spiritually tough.

¹⁶ As quoted in C. J. Mahaney, “Suffering and Sovereignty,” http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/pdf/teaching/suffering_sovereignty.pdf.

¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. Elyn Sanna, Urichsville: Barbour Publishing, MCMXCIX), 25.

- **James 1: 2-4**—“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”
- “Sometimes one finds a young man, say, who was reared in a Christian home, participated in Christian youth activities at home and at the university, married a Christian woman, and now cheerfully serves in his local Christian church. He may even have undertaken some short-term mission work somewhere—helping to dig wells in the Dominican Republic or working with the starving in Rwanda. Then he suddenly abandons his wife of ten years and his three children and takes up with a pretty lassie to whom he has been drawn at work. Everyone is scandalized.”
- But in some instances, at least, I suspect that there is very little evidence that the young man in question ever made a practice of making hard moral decisions that cost him anything. He made the “right” decisions, but they were scarcely painful or costly, because so many fine people were assuring him how wonderful he was. He did what he wanted to do. But he had not yet been tested by the kind of temptation that drew him to do something he wanted to do, but which he would resist simply because resisting was the right thing to do. He had not yet the kind of faith that cheerfully makes self-denying decisions simply because following Christ demands it.¹⁸

Finally, Beware of assuming that if you had enough information you would be able to make sense of the suffering.

- **Carson:** “The mystery of providence defies our attempt to tame it by reason. I do not mean it is illogical; I mean that we do not know enough to be able to unpack it and domesticate it. Perhaps we may gauge how content we are to live with our limitations by assessing whether we are comfortable in joining the biblical writers in utterances which mock our frankly idolatrous devotion to our own capacity to understand.”¹⁹
- **Sheila Walsh:** “The love of Christ is a fierce thing. It can take the picture you have of yourself and burn it in the fire of his loving eyes, replacing it with a true masterpiece.”²⁰

What should we do?

- In short, God is less interested in answering our questions than in securing our allegiance, establishing our faith, nurturing a desire for holiness. God tells us a great deal about himself; but the mysteries that remain are not going to be answered at a merely theoretical and intellectual level. We may probe a little around the edges, using the minds God has given us to glimpse something of his glory. But ultimately the Christian will take refuge from questions about God not in proud, omniscient explanations but in adoring worship.”
 1. Put the fellowship of the gospel at the center of your relationships with believers.
 2. Put the priorities of the gospel at the center of your prayer life.
 3. Put the advance of the gospel at the center of your aspirations.
 4. Put the converts of the gospel at the center of your principled self-denial.
 5. Put the gospel first. Such a valuation of the gospel ought to be not the exception among us, but the rule.

¹⁸ Carson, 57.

¹⁹ As quoted in C. J. Mahaney, “Suffering and Sovereignty,” http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/pdf/teaching/suffering_sovereignty.pdf.

²⁰ As quoted in “Your Best Friend,” in *Just for Kids*, no author or editor listed (Grand Rapids: Family Christian Press, 2006), 135.

6. Put the gospel first!!